

Creative Engagement Fellowship

- Summary Report 2022
Phase. 1: Pilot Projects
Short Version





ATTENBOROUGH
ARTS CENTRE



wellcome

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Links to relevant webpage will be placed throughout the document in coloured circles. The yellow circle is for external institutions and the green circle is for online materials made by and/or for the Creative Engagement Fellowship.





1

Introduction

Building Blocks

Through working with the Wellcome Trust and National Coordinating Centre for Public Engagement (NCCPE) to support the public engagement agenda for universities, Dr Marie Nugent, Public Engagement Manager for the University of Leicester, identified a gap within practice guidance and research surrounding collaborative work between researchers and artists, specifically with how this work could improve public access and engagement. By partnering with the NCCPE and using their 'What Works' process for developing practise guidance, some desk research was undertaken to better understand the current state of play for this area of work. It was revealed that it is very popular for researchers to work with artists for supporting the dissemination and engagement of their research, however, this tends to be within a commissioned-based relationship instead of the creative taking a direct role within designing the project itself.

True collaborative work has been identified as beneficial for both the academic and artist in terms of their engagement and the quality of the research output, nonetheless challenges such as lack of resources and understandings can stifle the work.

To address this gap in the sector, Dr Nugent and the NCCPE co-created expert guidance with a range of partners to support practice, which is available on the NCCPE website

The Fellowship built upon the aforementioned practise research and combined the experience gained in community-led partnership working through the U.matter engagement project, commissioning a range of projects and activities linked to health and wellbeing where often the community partners were themselves creative practitioners. It also took inspiration from a similar scheme promoted via the University of Exeter's Arts and Culture Unit.

Funding for developing the first phase of the Fellowship was provided by the University of Leicester's Wellcome Trust Institutional Strategic Support Fund, which supports universities to explore research culture change and increase the value of public engagement. The funding also supports equality and diversity initiatives that create real change within research and institutional cultures.

NCCPE
Science,
Research
Engagement and
The Arts

NCCPE
Engaging the
public through
art-research
collaborations

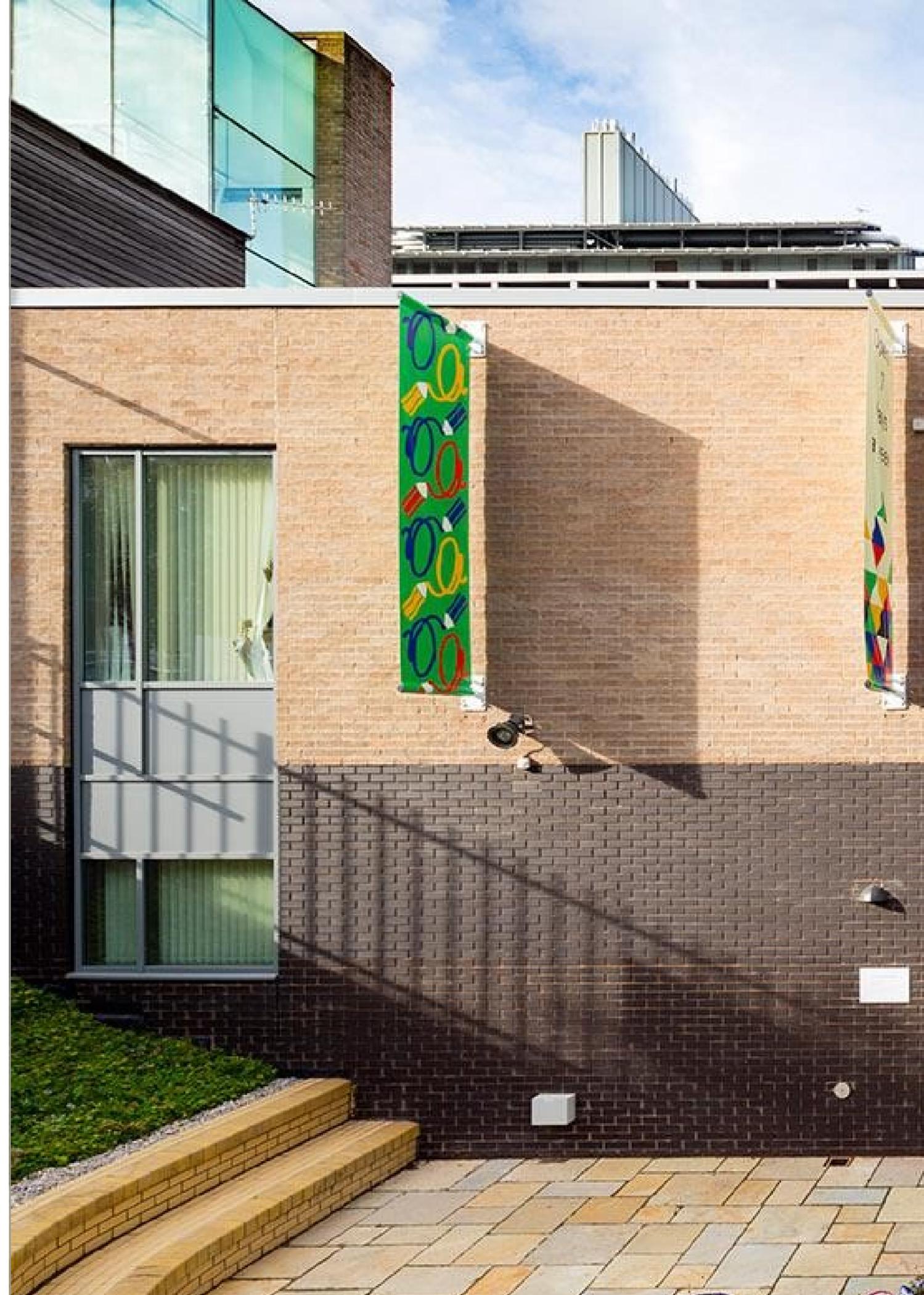
U.matter

Our Institutions

Attenborough Arts Centre and the University of Leicester are uniquely positioned to explore new ways of supporting collaborations between arts and research through the Creative Engagement Fellowship. Leicester is one of the most diverse cities in Europe with over 50% of the inhabitants identifying as non-white British. The centre and the university have worked to engrain themselves within the communities they support. The university was founded through donations raised by the Leicester community in the early 20th century and has since then undertaken ground-breaking research into various sectors. This has placed the university as a world leader in cutting-edge research and academia. The Attenborough Arts Centre was purpose built to provide access and promote inclusion in the arts for disabled people by working with communities across the city. With each institution constantly undertaking innovative research and exploring better ways to promote access and engagement, it places them perfectly to further academic engagement within our communities.

Changing Perspectives

The collaborations supported by this scheme generated beneficial impacts across the institutions, communities, research, and most notably the collaborators involved. They are empowered to gain skills that can enable them to work more effectively within their own roles. For the researcher, it enables them to inject creativity into their practice that values community engagement at the forefront of development. For the creative practitioners, it offers them the opportunity to engage with innovative research while developing their practice-skills. The mutual exchange of skills and expertise for opportunities to improve practice for engagement and inclusion across research and the arts is what underpins furthering the development of this scheme.

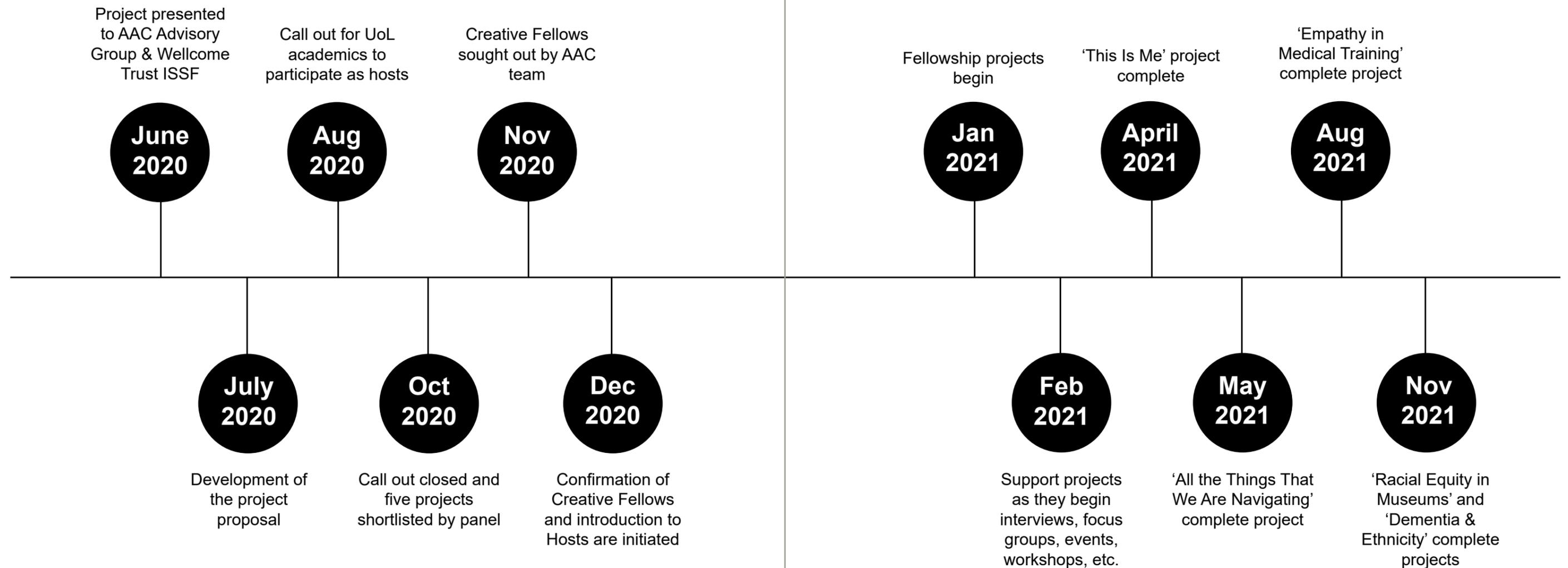


2

Phase. 1: Pilot

Timeline

Although a firm timeline was established at the start, flexibility was inbuilt into the framework as it took into consideration the ongoing effects of the Covid-19 pandemic on our lives, participants own prior commitments, and developing learning practices that came through the completion of the pilot phase.





Phase. 1: Pilot

Types of Projects

To structure the projects for each participant, two themes were identified for the academic hosts and creative practitioner to centre themselves around. Within the themes, any project could be developed as long as it aimed to respond to

Racial Equity 2020 Beyond Ableism

The 'Racial Equity 2020' theme aimed to respond to the Black Lives Matter campaign that garnered widespread attention in the summer of 2020, highlighting important conversations that need to take place while taking strides towards implementing racial equity in research.

Backed by the expertise at the Attenborough Arts Centre, 'Beyond Ableism' means to build meaningful inclusivity for people disabled, learning disabled, neuro-diverse, and those experiencing mental health issues in research engagement.

Application Process

To start the application process, an open call for expressions of interest document was developed to firstly explain what the Creative Engagement Fellowship was, its aims within the project, and the two themes that would be addressed within the work. To apply to host, the academics had to submit a short description of the context in which a creative practitioner might work, how this would support the research, the key contacts that would be engaged, any resources that would be available to them, key timescales, and considerations of their potential outputs, outcomes, and legacy for the project. These were to be completed and returned by email to Dr Marie Nugent by the 11th September 2020. In total 18 applications were received back showcasing a range of talent and an appetite for working creatively across the university. Projects varied widely in terms of disciplines and topics – each aiming to introduce ideas of creative collaboration, in order to make space for unique perspectives and skills to the research engagement issues being explored. Applications were received across all three major faculties; Colleges for Life Sciences, Social Sciences, Arts and Humanities, and Science and Engineering, as well as the Doctoral College. Of the applications, five projects were to be headed by male identifying leads and 13 were to be headed by female identifying leads which is a noticeably common gender disparity for engagement activities.

Matchmaking Process

To decide upon the successful applicants, a panel was formed consisting of:

- **Dr Marie Nugent**, Public Engagement Manager from the University of Leicester who would later join the Attenborough Arts Centre.
- **Clare Hudson**, Head of Research and Enterprise Partnerships within the College of Social Sciences, Arts and Humanities at the University of Leicester.
- **Michaela Butter MBE**, the Director of the Attenborough Arts Centre.
- **Alistair Burns**, Customer Service Manager at Attenborough Arts Centre.

The Wellcome Trust ISSF Committee was consulted in order to ensure, from a funding perspective, the projects also aligned with key priorities for the originally secured funding from the Wellcome Trust.

Following the successful application process came the task of locating the creative practitioners to match up with the projects. The process and was supported by the following members of the AAC team:

- **Dr Marie Nugent**, Public Engagement Manager at the University of Leicester.
- **Michaela Butter**, Attenborough Arts Centre Director
- **Alistair Burns**, Customer Service Manager
- **Marianna C. Pape**, Learning and Outreach Manager
- **Rachel Graves**, Visual Arts Officer
- **John Kirby**, Programming Officer

From here the panel selected up to three creative practitioners that were thought to be a good match for the projects and hosts. Each artist was approached with an outline of the Fellowship to see whether they would be interested in the opportunity, and a final decision was reached by the Host and supporting AAC staff for which creative practitioners would be selected.

Funding

Upon final selection, each project was allocated £5000 - an agreed upon sum at the start of the development of the Creative Engagement Fellowship. In the application and introduction form,

Phase. 1: Pilot

it was established that the academic hosts would be responsible for the control and allocation of the funding to properly develop the project, buy resources, and correctly contract and pay the creative practitioners they collaborate with.

Final Projects

Five final projects were chosen for the Phase 1 Pilot consisting of research staff from the University of Leicester and creative practitioners. Each project was built upon the two core themes, Racial Equity 2020 and Beyond Ableism, and had interdisciplinary collaboration built into the process and outcome. The final projects are briefly listed below:

- 1** **Academic Host** **Title** This Is Me
Creative Fellow Prof John Maltby, Psychology
Angela Clerkin, Theatre-maker
- 2** **Academic Host** **Title** All the Things That We Are Navigating
Creative Fellow Kelly McCormack & Dr Jason Wickham, Doctoral College
Paula Varjack, Writer
- 3** **Academic Host** **Title** Empathy in Medical Training
Creative Fellow Dr Rachel Winter, Leicester Medical School
Clare Patey, Director of the Empathy Museum
- 4** **Academic Host** **Title** Dementia & Ethnicity
Creative Fellow Prof Elisabeta Mukaetova-Ladinska, Clinical Psychology
Phizzical, Theatre Company
- 5** **Academic Host** **Title** Racial Equity in Museums
Creative Fellow Katherine Bunning, CSSAH Museum Studies
Emii Alrai, Visual Artist and Researcher

1

This Is Me

Academic Host

Professor John Maltby. A Professor of Differential Psychology within the Department of Neuroscience, Psychology, and Behaviour at the University of Leicester. His research focuses upon personality, individual differences, and well-being within our society.

Creative Practitioner

Angela Clerkin. A working class, London-Irish, queer theatre maker, director, writer, and facilitator. Her company 'ClerkinWorks' brings together different strands of her innovative work to create visually rich, funny, provocative shows that use personal stories to connect with marginalised groups especially women, non-binary people and those who identify as LGBTQ+, working class and/or disabled.

Background

Maltby has spent his career exploring the idea of identity, focusing on how the dynamic between agency and structures shape human beliefs and behaviours. A key feature of his work involves analysing the capacity for human beings to make choices and to impose those choices on their world. Clerkin's experience of creative work into identities, marginalisation, and privileges within our current society was paired with Maltby's research to explore constructs and roles people play within the project.

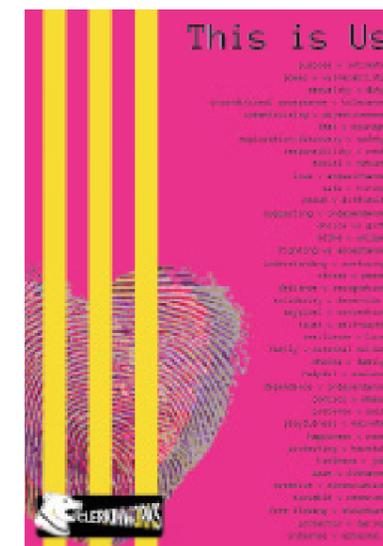
Developed Project

The project worked 12 participants who were women or non-binary and identified as LGBTQIA+, working class, and/or disabled. The project had a diverse range of 12 participants who were then split into two groups to receive a 3-hour workshop either on Monday or Tuesday for a total of 5 weeks. Using the exercises developed by Maltby within his research, they attended 3-hour workshops once a week with Clerkin to explore the concept of identity on a societal and individual level. Each session tackled a different idea that was linked to identity through creative writing, spoken word, drawing, and physical movement like Tai Chi. Afterwards, a booklet was constructed from the work achieved by the participants. The writing took the form of stories and poems, exploring discussions of the self and society.

Outcomes

Pre-project, Maltby intended to take the information gathered and translate them into data for his own research. However, as the project developed his mindset shifted and he began to consider the value of creative methods to gain impactful connections with communities that then would further his research with real-life identities, lived experiences, and first-hand stories.

Within the final evaluation, both parties noted that the project had impact in three main strategic areas: demonstrating the potential positive impact arts can have on improving research-related engagement and inclusion, showcasing the impact supported cross sectional engagement projects can have on innovative thinking and perspective for both the artists and academics, and exploring the impact that arts and culture activity can have on wellbeing. Within the project Clerkin and Maltby both noted how incredibly valuable they found the project for exchanging skills and building upon their knowledge base through utilising the perspectives of other disciplines.



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2

All the Things That We Are Navigating

Academic Host

UoL Doctoral College. The college is responsible for demonstrating the contribution that postgraduate researchers and staff do. The hosts were Kelly McCormack, Events and Communication Officer, and Dr Jason Wickham, Policy and Planning Advisor.

Creative Practitioner

Paula Varjack. An artist working in performance, video, and writing, her work makes sense of the world through storytelling. Her work has given her invaluable experience in tackling sensitive issues that pull people together through engaging mediums.

Background

The nature of postgraduate research means that the work is independent, however, this way of working can alienate students thus affecting mental health. Currently, institutions are reliant on surveys to understand experiences and mental health concerns, nonetheless studies indicate that students from minority ethnicities are more susceptible to mental health problems and less likely seek support. The project aimed to explore different ways of communicating that would improve the understanding of lived mental health issues for PGRs as well as create a medium of expression that can be used as an alternative for written communications.

Developed Project

It was decided upon that an interactive sound piece would be developed through interviews and conversations with UoL staff and postgraduate researchers to explore mental health. From March, Varjack created an anonymous online audio repository with five UoL staff who identified as white and five PhD students who identified as either black, biracial, or non-ethnic contributing recordings from a range of prompts. The participant's thoughts were gathered about their relationship with mental health and how their ethnicity and postgraduate research played a part in this. The thoughts of the students and staff were then edited and uploaded onto an interactive website.

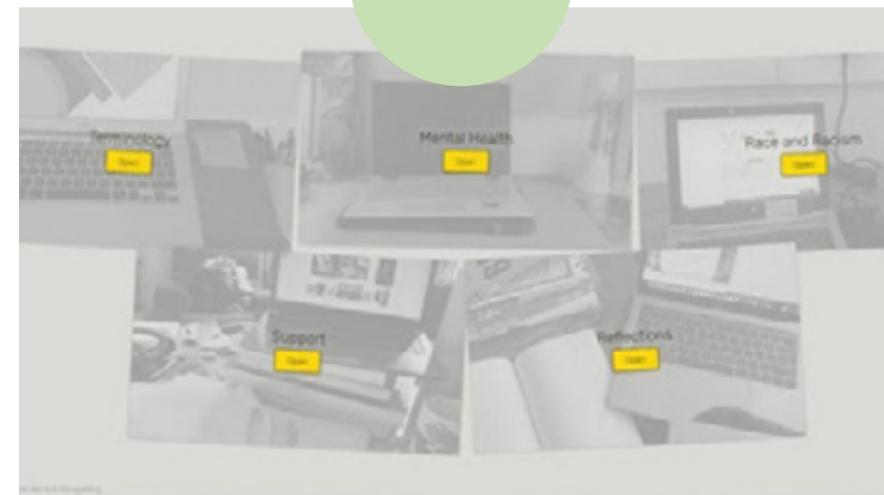
The featured voices were presented on a sliding scale where the user could hear opinions on the same topics from both staff and students, with emphasis on the topic of mental health awareness for ethnic minority groups at the institution.

Outcomes

The interactive audio site placed the voices of students juxtaposed and overlaid with those of staff members in a way that highlights the 'gap' between them. For example, Varjack noted that despite the

topic of conversation taking place being underpinned by race-based differences in experience, staff tended to circumvent talking about race. For students who identified as ethnic minorities, their experiences in many ways was framed by this and was enhanced by a lack of representation in staff who they felt could understand this element of their experience. This will continue to be a valuable tool for furthering the conversations and changes required within the institution to address racial inequities in mental health, in particular finding alternative ways to better support PGR mental health due to the increased risk for these students. As this powerful audio resource was not an intended output from this work at the start of the project, the team has issues ensuring full consent of all participants to be able to share publicly until much later than hoped. Moving forward, this matter will be a serious consideration as part of the planning and creation of Phase 2 of the Creative Engagement Fellowship.

Interactive Sound Piece



4

Dementia & Ethnicity

Academic Host

Professor Elizabeta Mukaetova-Ladinska. Working in Psychiatry at the College of Life Sciences UoL, she has spent her career driven by the objective of improving clinical outcomes to benefit old-aged patients. Her role as the academic host gave an opportunity to examine dementia with the consideration of ethnicity.

Creative Practitioner

Phizzical. A theatre company based in Leicester, the establishment commissions and produces South Asian arts and cultural experiences. Their work aims to represent their communities to empower the next generation with global stories that are adventurous, brave, and collaborative.

Background

Research into ethnic populations within the UK, in regard to mental health and ageing, have shown that there are barriers to engagement in mental health education as well as ethnic/racial barriers due to cultural beliefs and social stigmas. This project draws on this research while focusing upon South Asian communities within Leicester, in the aims of building a dataset to construct contextualised creative and tangible means to reduce social stigma for certain older ethnic minority people around ageing and mental illnesses.

Developed Project

The aim was to explore a range of topics that could provide a cultural pathway to communicating ageing and mental health that were culturally relevant and meaningful. Particular examples of cultural events for with British Asian communities were used to explore the impact of disparities in gender conditioning, migration, the Partition of British India and cross generational identities and their ongoing effects on the communities' relationships mental health, ageing, and illnesses. Phizzical Theatre Company develop shows that highlight and explore these elements of culture and through the Fellowship shared their approach to developing two events: Ladies Sangeet and an installation project called Pagal. A Sangeet is the equivalent of Western Hen Nights to bring women of all ages together in a cultural event to create a supportive and safe environment to engage in discussions about age beauty, societal taboos, and dementia. Pagal, is based around the Punjabi word used for dementia that means 'mad' or 'crazy' and will explore the identity of an Asian man while addressing aspects of the community that can feed into the 'othering' of mental illnesses within their communities such as

as dementia. They were in exchange brought in to observe clinics and from sharing observations were able to create future cultural pathways to explore key themes with future patients.

Outcomes

The project itself has lasted longer than the original timeframe that was set, however, the main outcome for this project was set to increase in awareness, knowledge, skills, motivations, and attitudes around old age and cognitive decline among South Asian populations in Dementia clinic, and to improve the understanding of how this can be presented back through cultural storytelling to help reduce stigma. The legacy of the project is to continue building culturally relevant context for people within Dementia care in Leicester and improve mental health ageing research in future.



PHIZZICAL
TOMORROW'S STORIES TOLD TODAY

5

Racial Equity in Museums

Academic Host

Dr. Katherine Bunning. Within her research, Dr. Katherine Bunning responds to the urgent need for museums, galleries, and professional bodies in the cultural and heritage sectors to actively challenge ongoing colonialism and systemic racism within the industry.

Creative Practitioner

Emii Alrai. A visual artist and a graduate of Museum and Art Gallery Studies, Alrai's work is informed by inherited nostalgia, geographical identity, and the postcolonial museum practices of collecting and exhibiting objects. Her work asks how we consider sculptural practice and the decolonisation of museum spaces.

Background

New research undertaken by Dr. Katherine Bunning suggest that within the museum and gallery sector a lack of confidence, race-equity literacy, risk-taking, and the negative perception of being perceived as too 'political' has stifled work into growing more equitable and inclusive institutional cultures. The Fellowship offered the chance to collaborate with a creative practitioner to bring together Critical Race Theory and emerging decolonial practice in museums in order to understand the needs and change required within the sector today through a creative and engaging perspective.

Developed Project

Over several months, Bunning and Alrai meet online to discuss the current institutional cultures found within the sector, with a specific focus on approaches to interpreting and curating the natural world. A series of site visits and research conversations with artists, conservators, curators and natural science experts in the field were undertaken to unpack emerging ideas of decolonial thinking and practice. The process led to key findings on the unique legacies and opportunities of museum work in reframing our relationships with nature. The process itself was documented and contextualised throughout the development, resulting in the design of an online resource to support greater sector engagement within racial theory research.

Outcomes

Due to various circumstances, the project itself took longer to complete than originally planned for. Although the research project has been completed at the time of writing, the final output – the online resource - has not yet launched, and a full evaluation of the project is still pending. However, less tangible but no less significant outcomes include the process of undertaking academic research

in a way that foregrounds artistic expression and open dialogue with practitioners. The process itself has embraced narrative testimony and reflection on lived experiences that Critical Race Theory recognises, alongside non-hierarchical and decolonial frames of knowledge production.





3

Evaluation

The pilot phase of the Fellowship offered the chance to experiment and establish a framework, which could be evaluated moving forward. The first phase was specifically created in such a way that allowed for the free collaboration of new ideas throughout the projects, allowing aspects to develop naturally while providing support. In some respects, this approach worked effectively to create an environment where the academics had to support themselves in specific aspects, such as control of the funding. This reflected the manner in which interdisciplinary collaborations would occur outside of the Fellowship. However, in other aspects it led to less regimented management of time and resources which contributed some projects working past the original 3-month mark, amongst other factors.

To understand the participant's thoughts and experiences within the project itself, two surveys were created for the participants: one before the start of the project and one intended for after completion, alongside written summary reports. The collaborators were also engaged in open discussions with Dr Marie Nugent which were then recorded to provide further depth of insight. The findings from the surveys and conversations are summarised below.

Although not all of the participants took part in the surveys, the sentiments that were found within it were in line with what was found within the conversations and evaluations from each project.

Impact

Within the first survey it was found that the participants expected to gain different perspectives through their collaborations to ultimately change their thinking around engagement, with all saying they had very little prior experience of this. The expectations ranged from learning new skills to building new relationships. Within the survey and the evaluations, it was found that general concerns were not prominent within their minds, however some were worried about the risk of their academic reputation if the project was not successful, the slow speed at which the university would be able to pay the artist thus hindering relationship building, and the workload that would come with the project. In terms of budgeting the funding was seen as appropriate for the intended outcome, nonetheless some improvements were highlighted on the management of the timeline itself and to consider implementing consistency across file templates.

Within the second survey, much of the same sentiments were found. When asked about how they view these types of collaborations now, all stated that they found employing creative perspectives essential as it enabled growth within the research itself that enriched the practice. In terms of working within the collaborative space, each participant said that their confidence in this area grew which opened more pathways to facilitate collaborative research, however more learning was still required which could be gained through further projects such as the Fellowship. Overall, the collaborations were noted as working well from both ends with only a few communication problems. As before, there were concerns over the timeline itself with many stating that a longer stretch of time could produce more radical and far-reaching outcomes. All said they would complete this type of interdisciplinary collaborative work again as it opened their eyes to the possibilities, making them see how many more departments needed creativity within their work.

A large part of the Fellowship was built around skills exchange and to gain wider diversity within research to change institutional cultures, however one of the lasting desired impacts was to support engagement with communities more effectively thus making the academic work accessible to all. It would require long-term engagement with the communities worked with through each pilot project to assess if their relationship with academia had changed to get a better view of whether this had in fact been impacted. Due to the short timeframe that the initial projects were placed upon, this impact can be difficult to capture, quantify and manage. It is therefore potentially more apt for this Fellowship to focus on the impact on the collaborators themselves and their approach to furthering their engagement practice that is best suited for this scheme moving forward.

Phase. 2

Phase 2 of the Fellowship will begin in 2022. Based on feedback received through surveys, evaluations, and reflections, the following considerations have been taken for how the next phase would run. Some aspects were identified as working effectively, where other avenues required more work.

From reflecting on the pilot, we have observed that:

- New partnerships take a long time to get up and running, therefore maybe 3 months is not an acceptable amount of

Evaluation

time based on the outcomes wanted.

- Partnerships with most support completed earlier and with more clarity, compared to those who completed aspects of the projects more on their own.
- Useful to gather evaluation throughout the project not just at the start and the end.
- Openness to how time was used may have been too open for some leading to de-regimented timescales and confusion.
- Contracts/consent for each project drawn for future rounds beforehand to ensure that the projects are fully prepared.
- Although some had no problem with budgeting the funding, others with little prior experience in this area struggled breaking up the budget into time vs materials, so maybe helpful to have a separate budget for each aspect.
- Explore better ways of capturing impact.
- Focus purpose of scheme to ensure there is no confusion and a focus on the end goal.

At this point opportunities for Phase 2 have been identified to further establish the Fellowship moving forward:

- Focus the scheme purpose on the ideas of skills knowledge exchange for professional development, public engagement, and creating inclusive research.
- Focus on targeting early career researchers and developing artists, as they take what they have learned within the schemes throughout their careers thus changing their own established cultures from the start of their careers.
- Establish more realistic timeline for new partnerships.
- Ensure consistent support in place for all projects through meetings, networking, brainstorming sessions, etc.
- Build in time for cohort to interlink and share to further establish the ideas of collaboration across disciplines.
- Build in networking/training leading up to call out.
- Create Creative Engagement Fellowship contract/consent form for partners & participants.
- Link scheme to Leicester Institute for Inclusive Higher Education.

To learn more, explore the Creative Engagement Fellowship webpage on the Attenborough Arts Centre website.

Creative
Engagement
Fellowship
Webpage

Creative Engagement Fellowship

Phase. 1: Pilot Projects

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